

REPORT ON HINDU STUDIES CHAIR

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

September 16, 1992

Introduction

On June 21, 1989, Dr. Krishna Sivaraman, retired full professor, formerly from the Department of Religious Studies, McMaster University, accepted the appointment as the first occupant of the Chair in Hindu Studies, Department of Religion, Concordia University. The Chair had been established from funds raised by the Hindu community in Montreal and others throughout Canada and elsewhere. The fund for the Hindu Studies Chair amounted to \$500,828.64 in June 1989, and this fund was matched by a grant from the Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship, Government of Canada (see audited financial statement enclosed). In his first year as Chair of Hindu Studies, Professor Sivaraman established a record of achievement that would be difficult to match. Unfortunately, on 28 September 1990, Professor Sivaraman was admitted to Montreal General Hospital to have an operation, which, at the time, was diagnosed as a routine, although serious, operation. In the months that followed Professor Sivaraman remained on sick leave from Concordia University, although he continued to be relatively active with the Hindu community of Montreal. His condition worsened and on November 24, 1991, he died. The report that follows, therefore, would have been more detailed, if, indeed, Professor Sivaraman could have written it. I asked Associate Professor David Miller to prepare the report, as best he could, from his experience of having worked closely with Professor Sivaraman during his first year.

Academic Year 1989-1990

A. Teaching

In his first year Professor Kirshna Sivaraman taught three courses, the descriptions of which follow:

Religion 299A/3 (6 credits) M.W. 1445-1600
INTRODUCTION TO HINDU RELIGIOUS THOUGHT
Instructor: Dr. K. Sivaraman

This course will present an historical introduction to Hindu religious thought, beginning with the earliest texts of the Vedic period and ending with the writings of contemporary Hindu thinkers such as Sri Aurobindo Ghose and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. Students will examine in depth the six principal schools of Hindu philosophy, with particular emphasis upon the Vedantic schools of religious/philosophical thought.

Religion 3980/2 (3 credits) W. 2025-2230
CLASSICAL INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

Instructor: Dr. K. Sivaraman

A study of the conceptual and thematic issues of the 'orthodox' schools of Hindu philosophy in interaction with Jaina and Buddhist systems of thought. The focus of the course will be on Sankara's Vedanta in the general setting of Indian philosophy.

Religion 398H/4 (3 credits) W. 2025-2230
NEO-CLASSICAL AND CONTEMPORARY INDIAN PHILOSOPHY
Instructor: Dr. K. Sivaraman

A study of the concepts and themes of Indian philosophy as developments in reaction to Sankara in the Post-Sankara schools of Vedanta, and of Neo-Vedanta in the philosophical writings of Ramakrishna, Radhakrishnan, Bhattacharya and Sri Aurobindo.

In the academic year that followed, Professor Sivaraman and the Department of Religion worked out a series of undergraduate courses that presented to students a concentration in Hindu Studies. (see Appendix A, list of Hindu Studies Courses). In addition to university courses, offered to undergraduate students, Professor Sivaraman held a weekly course, open to all interested individuals in which he read the Upanishads (Hindu philosophical texts) with them, commenting on the use of Sanskrit language in order to understand the meaning of the texts. Further, he enlisted a teacher who taught an informal course in Hindi language to interested students.

B. Research and Publications

In October of 1989, Professor Sivaraman and Professor Miller applied for an SSHRC grant for \$80,000. over a two year period, to study Hindu institutions in Montreal and across Canada. It should be noted here that the institutions selected for study were organized by Indian nationals and hence, these institutions were not those that have come to be known as "North America cultic groups". Although the grant proposal was turned down by SSHRC, Professor Sivaraman was encouraged to re-submit the grant application, with suggested revisions, in the following academic year. In the fall of 1989, Professor Sivaraman, as editor, published Hindu Spirituality, New York: Crossroad Press, which contained nineteen essays, many that were written by his Canadian colleagues in Hindu Studies. Throughout that year Professor Sivaraman began work on Hindu Spirituality, Volume II, which will be published in 1992/93. He also wrote a chapter, entitled "Radhakrishnan, Philosopher and Statesman", which was published in Radhakrishnan centenary volume, Delhi: Oxford University Press.

C. Conferences

Throughout the academic year 1989/90 Professor Sivaraman was extremely active in organizing conferences dealing with Indian and Hindu matters. He also was invited to give several lectures at major international conferences. The list of paper presentations that follows was copied from his c.v. submitted to the Dean of Arts and Science, Concordia University in the spring of 1990.

November 3, 1989, "Whither Hindu Studies?". An Inaugural Lecture, Concordia University.

November 21, 1989, Respondent to 3 papers at South Asia Conference, University of Wisconsin.

December 1, 1989, "The Future of Hindu Philosophy", Benares Hindu University.

December 17-19, 1989, Prestigious Endowment Lecture Series (3 lectures) at the Centre for Advanced Study in Philosophy, University of Madras.

December 29, 1989, "The Relational Spirituality of Srivaishnaivism in the Akam Poetry of Nammalvar". Invited Presentation. International Conference on Srivaishnava Studies, University of Bombay.

February 23, 1990, "Philosophy, Its Meaning and Methods: East and West. Invited Presentation. Philosophy Department Colloquium, University of Missouri.

March 5, 1990, "Hindu Reflections on Avatar". Invited participant. Franciscan and Bhakti Spirituality Conference. St. Bonaventure University, New York.

March 30, 1990, "Problem Areas in Hindu Studies". Invited presentation, Department of Religious Studies, University of Saskatchewan.

April 5-8, 1990, "The Nature of Godhead in Sankara's Commentary on Brahma Sutra". Plenary Address at the International Conference on Sankara.

Department of Philosophy, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio.

In addition, to more formal, scholarly papers and conference, Professor Sivaraman organized two conferences that were open to the Hindu community and other interested residents of Montreal. The first conference was entitled "Festival of India" and consisted of three nights of movies and discussion dealing with India and current social/religious problems in India. On the fourth evening,

February 7, 1990, a series of short presentations by representatives of the Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian communities in Montreal, was followed by active audience discussion. The second conference, entitled, "Perspectives on Hindu Ethics in a Changing World" (April 19, 1990) was a series of papers given by:

T.S. Devadoss, Director. Radhakrishnan Institute of Advanced Study in Philosophy, University of Madras.

S. Gopalan, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy. National University of Singapore.

R. Sundararajan, Professor and Chair. Department of Theology, St. Bonaventure University.

Although the second conference was of a more limited scholarly nature, it was well attended by interested residents of Montreal area. Finally, Professor Sivaraman participated in a series of lectures, organized by the Department of Religion, Concordia University, entitled "Memorial Lectures for the Women Massacred at the Ecole Polytechnique", also open to the public.

In addition to these activities, he wrote a number of popular articles on Hinduism for a Hindu community weekly newspaper, Pragati.

C. Supervision of Graduate Students

During 1989/90 Professor Sivaraman served as an adviser for two Ph.D. candidates in Comparative Ethics, Concordia University and as an adviser for at least three Ph. D. candidates at universities elsewhere. But, of equal importance, Professor Sivaraman began to attract Indian students, who in the next year would have taken graduate work with him. There is no doubt, had he not become ill,

that he would have contributed significantly to Graduate Studies in the Department of Religion, Concordia University, as indeed, he had done at McMaster University.

Unfortunately, after an extremely impressive and active year, Professor Sivaraman became critically ill, and although he continued to hold the Chair in Hindu Studies in 1990/91, he was unable to teach and unable to organize the type of activities that he had begun in the previous year.

It was hoped that Professor Sivaraman would be able to teach in the 1991/92 academic year and preparations were made to accommodate him (e.g., giving him an office and classrooms which were wheelchair-accessible). When it became clear that he would not be in a

condition to teach, Dr. Srinivas Tilak was engaged to teach Dr. Sivaraman's Hindu Studies classes on a part-time basis. Dr. Tilak did more than teach the classes, however. He maintained contact between the university and the Hindu community and initiated several projects for this purpose. The major one was a brochure designed to explain the chair and its activities to the community. Because of the major effort the Department of Religion had to make in recruiting for no less than four positions in 1991/92, the completion of the brochure was deferred. It is expected to be completed this fall. Because of these efforts, Dr. Tilak was given a limited-term, full-time contract with the university beginning in January 1992.

During the 1992/93 academic year, a search was made for a successor to Dr. Sivaraman. The unanimous choice of both the Department and the Hindu community was Dr. Anantan Rambachan of St. Olaf College, Minnesota. Unfortunately, he was contractually obliged to teach at St. Olaf in 1992/93 and will come to Concordia only next year. In the interim, Dr. Tilak has continued to teach Hindu Studies courses and serve as a link to the Hindu community. One of his projects for the fall, the initiation of a dialogue between the Hindu and Jewish communities of Montreal through the intermediacy of the Department of Religion, looks especially promising.

Ira Robinson, Chair
Department of Religion